

MONOCLE

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Inspirational workspaces Labour of love

Preface

We spend most of our lives at work, so a well-designed environment that incorporates good lighting, space, order, and a touch of fun makes for a productive and happy staff. Here we showcase four firms who have got the right mix.

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Shinichi Ito, Lukas Scherrer, Patrick Strattnner

01 The creative showcase Jamo, Tokyo

Antique bell jars, the head of a deer, cascading green plants and a white neon sign screaming “Pump Up The Volume” may not instantly bring to mind the word “office”. But such an office environment seems only appropriate for Jamo Associates, the Tokyo-based interior design company renowned for creating spaces that are as contemporary as they are eclectically cosy.

It was six years ago that Jamo founders Norito Takahashi, the interior designer, and interior stylist Chinatsu Kambayashi, moved staff into the quiet office building in Azabudai. The area – a stone’s throw from Tokyo Tower and a string of embassies – seems a million miles from more conventional design-saturated areas such as Harajuku or Nakameguro. “But I quite like that,” says Takahashi. “In Harajuku, there’s too much distracting stimulation. The quiet here clears your head.”

Moving into the building gave the company the chance to show off what they do best – make over spaces. Ceilings were ripped out to reveal industrial metal and raw wood frames upon which neon spotlights were fixed and conventional office carpets removed to showcase original mat black vinyl flooring.

Today, the 11 staff sit at Jamo-made oak desks at the office front, with an oval leather patchwork table and sofa at the rear for meetings. The space is a carefully curated mix of the vintage (the old Meiji-era clocks), the quirky (a small plastic cow in a bell jar) and the modern (angular Michele de Lucchi desk lamps).



01



02



03

Pictures

- 01 Mix and match chairs sit at the Jamo office’s lengthy meeting table
- 02 Art and order go hand-in-hand
- 03 Wood samples

Why it works

- 01 Large glass-fronted antique cabinets – containing material samples and office tools – divide the space in a homely way and create storage space.
- 02 Vintage pieces such as the meeting table, cabinets and sofa, are nicely countered by more modern, sharply-lined pieces.
- 03 An abundance of green plants overflowing in one corner creates a breath of fresh air and a splash of colour.
- 04 Subtle signs of humour, from the little plastic cow in a Victorian bell jar to the five black crows on the bookcase and the neon “Pump Up The Volume” sign.

Suggestions of this, however, prompt laughter from Takahashi. “Everything here has been used in a design project. We tried to put the antlers in a new store, but the owners said ‘no animals thank you very much, please take them away’. We never throw anything away.”

So it seems only natural that Jamo recently expanded to a second floor – complete with mismatched chairs and stacks of sample materials. “We wanted it to feel more home than office,” says Takahashi. “A relaxed space where people don’t feel like they should be wearing a suit and necktie.” — DD Jamo.jp



01



02



03

Pictures

- 01 The office space
- 02 Sculptural lighting
- 03 Exterior of the palazzo
- 04 The gold leaf table and Aldo Rossi leather chairs
- 05 Stucco ceilings

02 The pared-down palazzo Hager & Partners, Bolzano

The complexity of Italian business means companies often turn to specialists for help on tax and legal matters. However, well-ordered consultants’ offices soon get cluttered with piles of paperwork. So when the Bolzano office of accounting firm Hager & Partners decided it was time to upgrade to a roomier workspace, they in turn sought out expert advice.

Completed in 2008 by Milan studio Vudafieri Saverino Partners, the brief was to house the staff on two floors of an 18th-century palazzo in the historic centre of the South Tyrolean capital. Originally a hotel that hosted Habsburg nobility, the Baroque building had beautiful original details – stucco ceilings and parquet flooring – that were refurbished. “I’m a believer in *genius loci* [the spirit of places], so we incorporated them to create a dialogue between the contemporary and the historical,” says architect Tiziano Vudafieri.

Modern elements added to the 1,000 sq m space include a collection of sculptural lighting, several designed in-house by Vudafieri, and a conference table in gold leaf finish with curvy legs (right). “We played on the baroque theme but didn’t exaggerate as it’s a Mitteleuropa style,” says Vudafieri.

Local carpenters built much of the furniture, while white walls are punctuated by the addition of contemporary artwork from the client – the firm’s owner is an avid collector. In one corner, a canvas by US artist Steven Parrino has rough folds that mimic the ceiling decoration.

Slightly more austere is the owner’s corner office, which includes a side table with fold-out chairs in velvet similar to that used at the Opéra de Paris. A lone Tolomeo lamp is the only desk accessory, while two provocative paintings hang opposite each other. “It’s a transparent place,” adds Vudafieri. “But it lets clients know who’s in charge.” — IC vudafierisaverino.it



04



05

Why it works

- 01 Wooden floor: The original parquet throughout most of the office keeps staff well grounded.
- 02 Inspiration: Modern art punctuates the large wall spaces, stimulates creative minds and shows off good taste to clients.
- 03 Well-lit: Bespoke lights break up the monotony and add a cosy touch to the desk spaces.
- 04 A touch of craft: The handcrafted wooden accents dotted around recall the area’s local carpentry heritage.





Why it works

- 01 The office boasts a clear division of working areas while remaining open. The bustling production floor has a jovial family atmosphere, with workers chatting as they shape metal or assemble frames on brightly lit tables.
- 02 Plenty of common spaces that allow an energetic, growing team to relax, convene and brainstorm.
- 03 There's impeccable organisation, but with a touch of creative chaos. Throughout MYKITA HAUS materials, components and finished product are meticulously organised, labelled and tracked, but the workstations still reveal lots of personality.

03 The office with good vision MYKITA, Berlin

MYKITA has been creating sleek eyewear since 2003, almost entirely by hand, at its in-house production facilities in Berlin. Founded by the clear-sighted quartet of Harald Gottschling, Daniel Haffmans, Philipp Haffmans and Moritz Krueger, the company started off with a handful of employees in an East German daycare centre (called a "Kita", hence the company name). They soon moved to what they call the MYKITA HAUS, a rambling four-storey converted stables just off of Mitte's trendy Brunnenstrasse.

Even if MYKITA's office is now able to produce over 500 pairs of specs a day, the company culture remains resolutely human, with staff mingling in spaces that reference Berlin's eclectic past. The old stables' iron pillars punctuate vaulted ceilings, and the office entrance is separated from the main street by a back courtyard with lots of bicycle parking. Organised into clearly defined but still open work and play zones, the first floor is devoted to design and an archive/storage area, the second floor to accounting, the third to frame production and the top floor to PR and corporate design.

A large common kitchen, table football and a courtyard with picnic tables allow for both team-building and down time. The staff even eat meals – prepared by a hired chef – together, twice a week. Exposed brick makes for a cosy domestic feel, and even if it's now bursting at the seams, the MYKITA HAUS encapsulates how to keep a sense of scale when a small business begins to boom.

— KB mykita.com



Pictures

- 01 Social areas
- 02 MYKITA staff
- 03 Frame production table
- 04 Finished products
- 05 The store's glass front
- 06 Iron pillars in the office
- 07 Designer at work



04 The home office SHIBULERU, San Francisco

Although industrial designer Lukas Scherrer estimates he has spent around \$100,000 (€72,000) over the years on furnishings for his apartment and home office in San Francisco's North Beach district, some of his most beloved items cost nothing at all. He bought his work desk, a spare, grey Norman Foster design, for \$250 (€180) at an auction in Switzerland. There were no other bidders. And he found the chair that stands next to it, an Eames model by Herman Miller, in a dumpster in Zürich Airport, where he worked as a luggage handler when he was a student.

Scherrer was born and trained in Zürich, and moved to the US in 2004 for a job as a designer at global design consultancy IDEO. He quit in June to start a home-based design firm, SHIBULERU, and though he is only 32, his résumé brims with interesting projects. At IDEO, he was on a team that developed external hard drives for Western Digital. Vents were needed to keep the drives cool, but the group made them into a distinctive feature: the incised dots and dashes spelt out the brand's values and the initials of the designers in Morse code.

His other projects include a single-button mobile phone for the elderly and a baby bottle that is intended to replicate the experience of breast-feeding. After studying pictures of pregnant women online and consulting with his wife, a paediatric nurse, Scherrer produced a soft, pink silicon teat that is curiously lifelike. He is part-owner of Mimijumi, the firm which has sold 20,000 of the bottles since late 2009.

Scherrer is currently working for a large US beverage manufacturer and a Swiss company that produces storage units resembling airline food carts. "I want to slow things down, to make things a little bit calmer," he says. "There's no need for design to be flashy." — AG shibuleru.com



Why it works

- 01 Plenty of light. Scherrer's giant windows, with a view of the Bay Bridge, get the sun all day, and in the evening the office is lit by an arching Tolomeo lamp.
- 02 A personal touch. Scherrer displays a model plane he won as a conscript in the Swiss military and the 28 sketchbooks he has filled since graduation. He always buys them at Zumstein in Zürich.
- 03 Warmth. Scherrer hates clutter – he cleans often and has a vacuum in the closet – but to avoid a Spartan feel he ordered two cowhides from an Argentine farm and uses them as rugs.
- 04 Taking breaks. Being in the same place for 12 to 14 hours a day can cause cabin fever, so Scherrer recharges at cafés in Russian Hill and North Beach.

ORGATEC 2010 All the fun of the fair at this global furniture showcase

A biannual office furniture trade fair held in Cologne, ORGATEC is a global affair: over 600 exhibitors attend from around 40 countries. ORGATEC is not usually where you'd come to kit out your office of five, it's for the big players – architects and designers with major office projects on the go.

That said, the trend for domestic-inspired workplaces witnessed at October's show meant there was much to be found for a small, or even home, office.

German company Jonas & Jonas Design Möbel launched a cost-effective laminate and plywood range (the desk, *below, right*, costs around €800) that makes the most of small spaces.

"Our aim is to cater for young companies who might be starting out of their spare room," says Hubertus Jonas. F/p design's pared down, modular 7000 shelving

system for Thonet is similarly adaptable for home or work.

The Boruoulllec brothers designed a high-backed sofa (*pictured*) system – Alcove work – for Vitra, which creates an enclosed space within a room, combining a structured sofa with a small desk and storage space.

"Flexibility and people-centred design is the most important thing for office furniture today," reckons Eckart Maise, head of Vitra's home division.

The sofa reimagined as a workspace was a recurring theme. Alongside Vitra, Dutch brand Prooff and Austrian brand Bene both introduced 'work sofas' but Swiss brand de Sede launched the most beautiful – an olive leather-upholstered design by Matteo Thun (*below*). With an upright structure, exquisite detailing and a 1950s feel, we suggest you buy two – one for work and one for home. — HM orgatec.com

